



# Facts

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## Foot-and-Mouth Disease

### What is foot-and-mouth disease?

It is a highly contagious viral disease of cattle and swine. Cloven-hoofed animals are susceptible and nearly 100 percent of those exposed become ill. Although the disease is not always deadly, it is painful and debilitating. Many young animals die. Animals that live may suffer sterility, chronic lameness, aborted pregnancies, and chronic mastitis.

Washington cattle, dairy cows, sheep, pigs, llamas and goats are vulnerable. So are vast herds of elk, deer and mountain goats, and the giraffes, elephants and other cloven-hoofed animals at zoos. If just one case occurred, thousands of animals could be infected because the virus can be carried up to 30 miles by the wind. That's why so many animals were slaughtered during the outbreak in Great Britain, last year. A buffer strip is needed to prevent the disease from spreading to healthy animals.

### Are humans susceptible to foot-and-mouth disease?

Foot-and-mouth is an animal disease and not a human health concern. The virus rarely affects humans and is destroyed when products are properly cooked or pasteurized.

### Is there a cure for foot-and-mouth disease?

No. In infected animals the virus runs its course in two to three weeks.

### Do we have foot-and-mouth disease in Washington?

No. The United States has not had an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease since 1929. However, outbreaks have occurred in Asia during the past five years, and it is widespread through Africa, Eastern Asia and a large part of South America. The effects of the European epidemic has heightened awareness and concerns in this country.

### Why is foot-and-mouth disease a threat to the U.S. now?

The risk of the disease entering the U.S. is not new; it has existed in many countries for years. It was just last year that the outbreak occurred in the United Kingdom. And, in April 2000, the state veterinarian issued a news release warning livestock producers to prevent farm or ranch visits by anyone who had been to South Korea or Japan because of an Asian outbreak of foot-and-mouth that was successfully contained. Increased travel and the globalization of food trade bring increased risks for disease and additional responsibilities to be on alert.

The United States has the most extensive disease surveillance and response system in the world. We do not import fresh meats or livestock other than horses from countries known to be infected with the disease. Import restrictions and thorough inspections at the borders ensure that animals coming into the country are disease free. Early detection through awareness and vigilance will help prevent a widespread outbreak in the U.S. The virus moves quickly, so if an outbreak is confirmed in the U.S., officials must act quickly to prevent further spread of the disease.

### What are symptoms of foot-and-mouth disease?

Painful blisters may form in the mouth or on the muzzle, causing slobbering or drooling. Later, the blisters break, forming raw patches or ulcers. Blisters can also develop on a female animal's teats, causing mastitis in dairy cattle. Blisters on the feet cause lameness. Affected animals are reluctant or unable to drink, eat or walk. And they will lose weight quickly.

### Why doesn't the U.S. vaccinate animals now?

Although a vaccine exists, there are seven separate types of foot-and-mouth virus. Immunity against one does not protect an animal from other types. A vaccination program would impair the United States' vast animal agricultural

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industry because animals sold for export must test negative for foot-and-mouth disease. There is no way to distinguish between a positive test from vaccine versus exposure to the disease.

### **How is foot-and-mouth disease spread?**

Animals are infected when they come into contact with animals, humans or materials that have been exposed to the virus. Contaminated feed, feeding utensils, vehicles, clothing or holding facilities may cause illness in susceptible animals.

Once they are infected, animals spread the virus to other animals and the environment when they breathe. Although they do not become ill, persons who have been around infected animals can carry the virus in their nasal passages for up to 24 hours. It is also carried on clothing, shoes, luggage, hair or other items that may be exposed. The virus is also carried in raw meat, animal products or milk from exposed or infected animals.

That is why it is so important for international travelers to declare **all** fruits, vegetables, meats, plants, soil and products made from plant or animal materials to U.S. Customs officials. One piece of meat or fruit may not seem important, but it is quite likely that a traveler carried the Mediterranean fruit fly to California, for example. The three-year fight to eradicate the pest cost more than \$100 million. And, British officials now believe their foot-and-mouth disease outbreak was caused by infected meat smuggled into England. The meat was served at restaurants and the leftovers were fed as swill to pigs.

### **How do you stop the virus?**

The virus can be destroyed on surfaces by applying heat and/or acid (vinegar) treatment, low humidity, and use of approved disinfectants.

### **My guest has a dog. Can he expose my pigs?**

The virus could be on the dog's fur. Play it safe. Ask your guest to give the dog – or other animals that may have been exposed to the virus – a bath and a good shampoo before it is allowed near livestock.

### **What should I do if I receive meat or animals products in the mail?**

If you receive meat or animal products from a country in which foot-and-mouth disease has been diagnosed, and your garbage goes to a landfill, put it in the trash. Do not dispose of any meat or other animal products where they could be eaten by animals. A single piece of contaminated sausage could set off a devastating foot-and-mouth epidemic in this country.

### **What should I do if I have foreign guests, or I have traveled abroad?**

If you or your guests are returning from a country in which foot-and-mouth disease has been diagnosed, take a shower, shampoo and change into clean clothing. Wash or dry-clean clothes in your suitcase. Use a disinfectant to remove all dirt or organic material from shoes, luggage and personal items. And, stay away from farms and zoos for five days.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Information about state and federal efforts to protect American agriculture against foot-and-mouth disease is available on the Web site of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at [www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html)

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